

**CITY OF EL PASO, TEXAS
REQUEST FOR COUNCIL ACTION (RCA)**

DEPARTMENT: Mobility Services
AGENDA DATE: May 19, 2009
CONTACT PERSONS/PHONE: Jane Shang, Deputy City Manager, 541-4327
DISTRICT(S) AFFECTED: ALL DISTRICTS

SUBJECT:

Approve a resolution/ordinance/lease to do what? Or authorize the City Manager to do what? Be descriptive of what we want city council to approve. Include dollar amount if applicable.

Discussion and action to support the recommendations of the Transportation Legislative Review Committee (LRC) that (1) the City's transportation vision include rail, but that immediate efforts be concentrated on improving the bus system (construction of five transfer terminals, bus stop and bus shelter improvements, express service, service efficiency and service expansion) and developing four Bus Rapid Transit Corridors (Mesa, Alameda, Montana and Dyer); and (2) that a request be made to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) that it conduct air quality modeling of rail traffic in El Paso.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION:

Discussion of the what, why, where, when, and how to enable council to have a reasonably complete description of the contemplated action. This should include attachment of the bid tabulation, or ordinance or resolution if appropriate. What are the benefits to the City of this action? What are the Citizen concerns?

The Transportation LRC met in February 2009 to discuss the role of rail in the City's transportation plan. The following topics were discussed:

- Rail in the Pass: Impacts of Rail in the El Paso Region;
- Potential Economic Development Resulting from Streetcar Systems; and
- Funding the Next Phase of the Moffat and Nichols Report to Address a Regional Rail Plan for the El Paso Region.

El Paso has a rich railroad history as many trains pass through El Paso. Subject to the economy, rail traffic is expected to increase from 50 trains/day to 100-200 trains/day. Rail movement occurs within the Downtown area which restricts traffic movement (especially at rail crossings), creates congestion and results in the low development of prime Downtown real estate. Discussion centered on relocating rail operations from the downtown area and trenching segment of rail lines. A regional rail plan would be required. These actions are directed to relieve congestion, encourage economic development and possibly provide a corridor for passenger rail service. The estimated cost could range from millions to hundreds of millions of dollars depending upon the construction option selected and operational railroad mitigation requirements.

Staff also made a presentation regarding potential economic development that could result from constructing and operating a streetcar system in the Downtown area. Many streetcar systems are being planned. Historical data indicates that streetcar systems encourage economic development along the route. The costs vary by City depending upon the level of enhancements in existence and required (\$3M-\$30M per mile). Staff also met with streetcar constituents and they acknowledged that El Paso is not ready for a streetcar system.

Recognizing that this City Council has directed staff to focus on improving the bus system and developing BRT corridors, as well as limited financial resources, the LRC voted 3-1 to take no action to actively pursue the development of a regional rail plan or a streetcar system. Realizing that rail needs

to be part of El Paso's transportation plan, the LRC directed staff to monitor railroad operations in El Paso to determine the timing for when a more active role should be initiated. Currently, staff meets monthly with staff from Burlington Northern Santa Fe and Union Pacific.

PRIOR COUNCIL ACTION:

Has the Council previously considered this item or a closely related one? In 2002, the City Council authorized the expenditure of approximately \$580,000 to conduct a Phase I project feasibility and development report studying a concept for regional rail (Regional Intermodal Rail Concept Plan). The Phase I report involved a request for federal funding and an evaluation of specific segment recommendations of the Plan. Intended as a two-phased approach, a second phase was intended to specifically conduct technical and economic studies evaluating the feasibility, cost and benefit of each component of the Plan. Prepared by Moffatt & Nichol Engineers, the Phase I report findings were presented in October 2003. The vote of City Council was to accept the Phase I report and not proceed with a Phase II component.

The City Council on October 21, 2008 authorized staff to apply for a \$500,000 rail grant to conduct a more comprehensive rail feasibility study. The City is still waiting to hear on this application.

AMOUNT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

How will this item be funded? Has the item been budgeted? If so. Identify funding source by account numbers and description of account. Does it require a budget transfer? Any further analysis and/or work related to a regional rail plan will most likely need to be funded by the City of El Paso as there does not appear to be any available federal funding. An estimated budget to develop the regional rail plan is \$500,000.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION:

Enter appropriate comments or N/A. N/A

*****REQUIRED AUTHORIZATION*****

LEGAL: (if required)_____

FINANCE: _____

DEPARTMENT HEAD:

APPROVED FOR AGENDA:

CITY MANAGER:_____

DATE:_____